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ABSTRACT

In the year 2000, approximately 13.2% of Australia's working age population (ages 15-64) was involved in some form of vocational education and training (VET) within the country's publicly-funded VET system, which represents an increase of nearly 2% compared with enrollment levels in 1977. Although female participation in VET has improved, males and females continue to undertake markedly different types of training. Australia's VET system has become an attractive option for entry-level training for young people and an increased focus for older individuals wishing to upgrade their skills, retrain, or undertake general interest studies. Students undertaking VET while still attending school account for approximately 8% of Australia's VET students. Rural and remote Australia is being well served by the country's VET system, with proportionally more students than their population shares. The numbers of indigenous peoples participating in recognized VET has increased from 38,000 in 1997 to nearly 52,000 in the year 2000. However, inequalities between indigenous and nonindigenous people in Australia's VET system specifically, from the standpoints of completion rates and levels of training undertaken continue to exist. The number of non-English-speaking students in VET has risen by 14.1% since 1997. The percentage of disabled individuals enrolled in VET continues to remain lower than that of the general population. (Contains 12 tables and 4 figures.) (MN)

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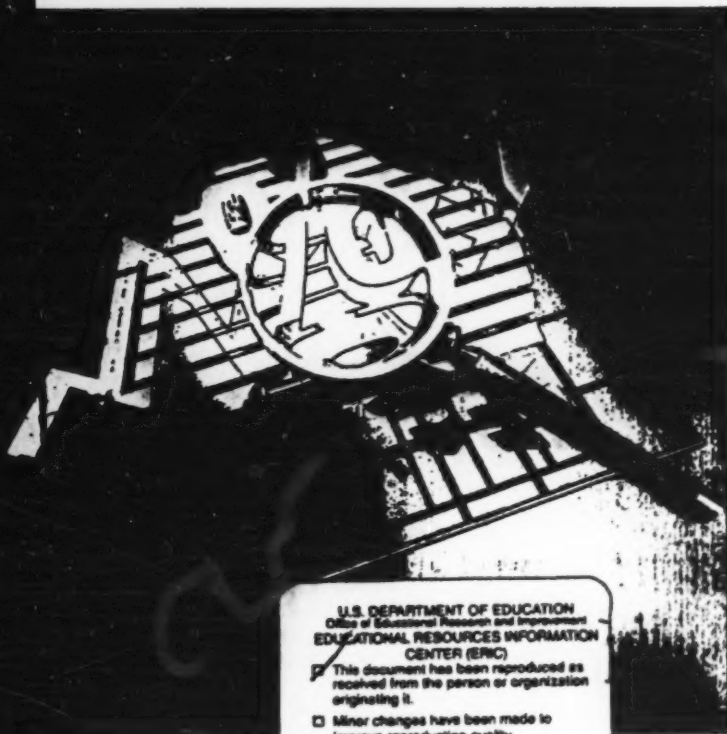
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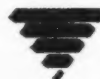


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Introduction

The vocational education and training system (VET) is designed to provide Australians with the skills needed to enter the workforce for the first time, to re-enter the workforce, to retrain for a new job and to upgrade skills for an existing job.

The system is broad and diverse, including publicly and privately-funded vocational education and training delivered by a wide range of training institutions and enterprises. Training takes place in classrooms, in the workplace, on-line and through other flexible delivery methods. The vocational education and training system provides training for Australians of all ages and backgrounds, for small and large enterprises and across all industries.

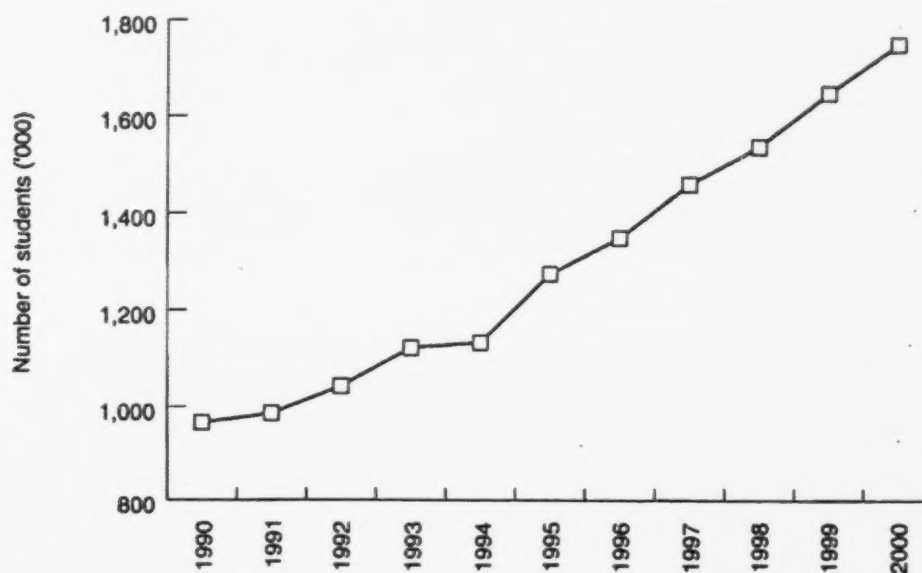
The year in perspective

During 2000, some 1.75 million students undertook training in the publicly-funded vocational education and training system. As a result, more than one eighth of Australia's working age residents were enrolled with publicly funded VET providers in 2000. Taking into account both publicly funded VET and VET delivered on a fee-for-service basis, about one in four Australians aged 15-64 years undertook some form of VET during 2000.

As shown in Figure 1, the number of students in vocational education and training increased steadily during the 1990s, with growth of almost 81% between 1990 and 2000, representing an annual rate of growth of 6.1%.

Recent research has indicated that students in the publicly-funded vocational education and training system have a similar socioeconomic profile to that of the general population. In other words, the system is particularly effective in providing services to the full socioeconomic spectrum of Australians.

Figure 1: Number of vocational education and training students, 1990 to 2000 ('000)



Recent trends

Looking more specifically at trends over recent times, participation in vocational education and training programs offered by publicly funded training providers has grown steadily since 1997, both in absolute student numbers and in proportion to Australia's population (Table 1).

Table 1: Vocational education and training participation, 1997 to 2000

	1997	1998	1999	2000
Student numbers in VET ('000)	1,458.6	1,535.2	1,647.2	1,749.4
% of Australia's resident population	7.9	8.2	8.7	9.1
% of Australia's working age population ¹	11.6	12.0	12.7	13.2
Annual hours in VET ('000 000)	302.2	312.8	331.1	346.1
Average annual hours per student	207.2	203.7	201.0	197.9

¹ Based on students aged 15 to 64.

As a result, student numbers have increased by 19.9% (or 290 800), from 1.46 million in 1997 to 1.75 million in 2000, corresponding to an annual growth rate of about 6.2% over the three year period. Specifically, 13.6% of Australia's working age population (15-64 year olds) were involved in some kind of vocational education and training within the publicly funded VET sector in 2000, an increase of almost two percentage points over that in 1997. It is also interesting to note that while both the number of students and total hours of training have been increasing since 1997, the average amount of training hours per student has been decreasing.

Sex

During the 1990s, there has been a substantial increase in both the absolute number and the relative proportion of females in the VET system. This has resulted in the proportion of female students rising to 49.2% in 2000 (Table 2).

Table 2: Male and female participation in VET, 1997 to 2000

Year	Males		Females	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
1997	756.9	51.9	701.7	48.1
1998	790.7	51.5	744.5	48.5
1999	839.4	51.0	807.8	49.0
2000	888.0	50.8	861.3	49.2

While there has been improvement in female participation within the VET sector over the past decade, differences in the type of training undertaken by males and females are still evident. In 2000, there was a far greater proportion of women studying in the business, administration and economics fields - 26.9% of all female VET students, compared with 14.9% of male VET students. On the other hand, engineering and

Other fields that are more popular among females than males include art, humanities, and social sciences; and health and community services. In addition to engineering and surveying, more popular choices for males included land and marine resources, animal husbandry; and architecture and building. The proportion of females studying subjects with no major field of study (6.8%) was twice as high as for males.

Although there were proportionally slightly more females than males studying certificate IV qualifications or above in 2000, there were proportionally fewer females studying at AQF certificate III, about 22% for males and less than 18% for females (Table 3). This is primarily a result of the dominance of males in engineering, surveying, architecture and building courses which comprise a greater prevalence of Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) certificate III qualifications.

Table 3: Differences in the type of training undertaken by males and females, 2000

Major field of study	Proportion (%)	
	Males	Females
Land and marine resources, animal husbandry	7.5	2.9
Architecture, building	8.6	0.9
Art, humanities & social sciences	4.9	8.6
Business, administration, economics	14.9	26.9
Education	2.1	3.0
Engineering, surveying	20.0	2.8
Health, community services	4.8	11.1
Law, legal studies	0.6	0.6
Science	6.8	7.0
Veterinary science, animal care	0.1	0.4
Services, hospitality, transportation	16.6	16.6
TAFE multi-field education	10.0	12.6
Subject only - no field of study	3.1	6.8
Total	100.0	100.0

Qualification	Proportion (%)	
	Males	Females
AQF certificate IV or higher	20.9	21.9
AQF certificate III or equivalent	22.0	17.7
AQF certificate I + II	22.1	22.3
AQF - other	1.9	2.0
Other recognised courses	7.9	5.9
Non award courses	22.0	23.5
Subject only - no qualification	3.1	6.8
Total	100.0	100.0
Number of students ('000)	860.0	661.3

¹ A student's major field of study is based on their major course. Because students can enrol in more than one course, their major course is the course leading to their highest qualification. In those cases where different courses undertaken by a student lead to the same qualification, the course accounting for the largest number of hours is considered their major course. Although students may enrol in more than one course, each student is counted only once in this table.

Age profile

Some differences in the major fields of study were evident across different age groups (Table 4). There is a greater tendency for students aged 15-24 to do courses in fields such as architecture and building; engineering and surveying; and services, hospitality and transportation. On the other hand, older persons, that is those aged 40-64 years of age, appear more likely to be undertaking courses in land and marine resources, animal husbandry; health, community services; education; and science. They are also more likely to be studying subjects not related to any specific course (ie modules only).

These differences in fields of study among age groups can partly be explained by differences in male and female training patterns within VET. For example, male students, who are more likely to enrol in engineering, building, architecture and building courses, comprise a greater proportion of the 15-24 year olds. In contrast, females, who are more likely to enrol in health and community services courses, make up a greater proportion of 40-64 year olds.

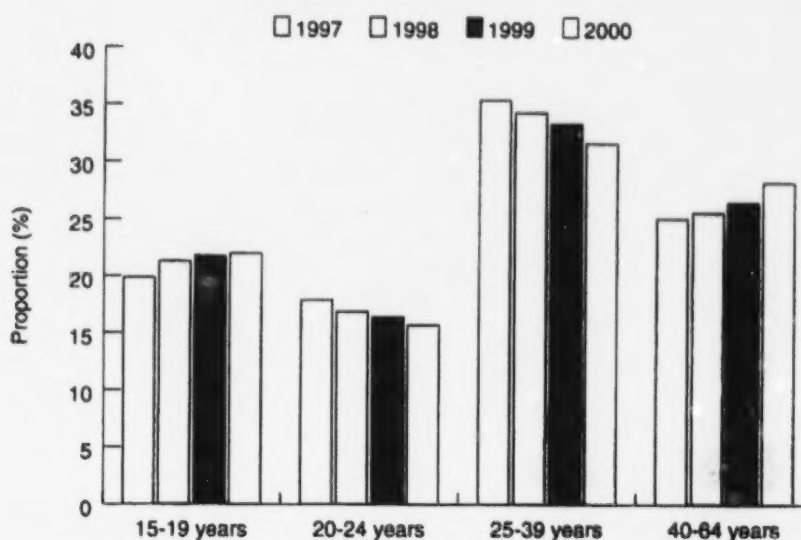
Table 4: VET students by age, major field of study and qualification, 2000

Major field of study	Proportion (%)			
	15-19 years	20-24 years	25-39 years	40-64 years
Land & Marine resources, Animal husbandry	4.1	4.6	5.6	6.0
Architecture, Building	7.9	7.1	4.1	2.6
Art, Humanities & Social sciences	5.7	6.8	6.9	6.5
Business, Administration, Economics	20.1	20.9	21.8	20.8
Education	0.6	1.0	3.1	4.3
Engineering, Surveying	15.9	16.2	11.1	7.8
Health, Community services	6.0	7.6	8.9	9.1
Law, Legal studies	0.5	0.8	0.8	0.4
Science	4.8	5.1	6.9	8.3
Veterinary science, Animal care	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.1
Services, Hospitality, Transportation	20.2	19.5	14.6	14.8
TAFE multi-field education	12.2	8.2	11.4	11.8
Module only - no field of study	1.7	1.9	4.6	7.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

AQF qualification	Proportion (%)			
	15-19 years	20-24 years	25-39 years	40-64 years
AQF certificate IV or higher	16.2	28.3	26.2	19.5
AQF certificate III or equivalent	27.9	28.5	17.5	14.3
AQF certificate I + II	35.0	19.7	19.9	17.8
AQF - other	2.2	1.8	1.8	1.8
Other recognised courses	4.8	5.6	7.8	8.7
Non award courses	12.2	14.1	22.2	30.2
Module only - no qualification	1.7	1.9	4.6	7.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

While the actual number of VET students has increased for all major age groups since 1997, the growth has been substantially higher for the 15-19 and 40-64 year age groups. As a result, the proportion of teenagers in the system has increased from less than 20% in 1997 to around 22% by 2000. Similarly, for persons aged 40-64 years of age, the proportion has increased from 25% to more than 28%. On the other hand the proportion of people aged 20-24 years and 25-39 years of age have decreased, from 18% to less than 16% for 20-24 year olds and from more than 35% to under 32% for people aged 25-39 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The proportion of VET students in major age groups, 1997 to 2000



Growth in participation has been evident across all major age groups since 1997, with the biggest growth occurring for teenagers. By 2000, over a quarter (28.5%) of all Australia's teenagers were undertaking some sort of vocational and education training (Table 5).

This suggests the VET system is becoming a more attractive option for entry level training for young people. The growth in older students reflects an increased focus by older persons upgrading their skills, retraining, or simply undertaking general interest studies.

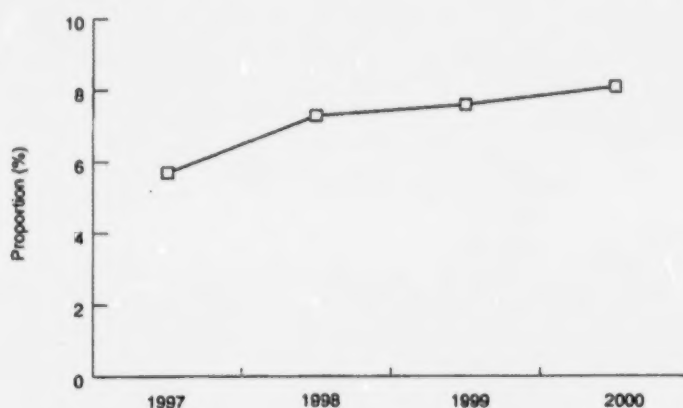
Table 5: Participation rates in VET by gender and age, 1997 to 2000

Age cohort	1997	1998			2000
		Male participation rates			
15-19 years	25.1	27.6	29.5		31.0
20-24 years	21.1	21.1	21.7		22.0
25-39 years	12.1	12.2	12.5		12.5
40-64 years	6.3	6.5	6.9		7.7
		Female participation rates			
15-19 years	19.7	22.2	24.1		25.9
20-24 years	16.9	17.1	17.9		18.2
25-39 years	11.6	11.9	12.5		12.6
40-64 years	7.5	7.9	8.6		9.5
		All persons participation rates			
15-19 years	22.5	24.9	26.9		28.5
20-24 years	19.0	19.1	19.8		20.2
25-39 years	11.9	12.0	12.5		12.6
40-64 years	6.9	7.2	7.8		8.6

Educational background

Students undertaking vocational education and training while still attending secondary school comprise an important and rapidly growing component of Australia's VET system. The number of people undertaking school-based VET has grown considerably since 1997, rising to over 100,000 students by 2000. This increase has resulted in the overall proportion of vocational students undertaking training while still attending school rising to almost 8% by 2000 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The proportion of VET students still attending school¹, 1997 to 2000



¹ Based on students whose school status was reported.

Almost a quarter (24.4%) of students undertaking vocational education and training in 2000 have post-school qualifications (Table 6). The proportion of students who have a previous tertiary vocational or academic qualification has remained much the same over the years 1997 through 2000 (Table 6). Of these, most held a trade or technical certificate. There are however a growing number of students who enter the vocational education and training system with a degree or postgraduate diploma. These students tend to enrol in VET for personal development or to gain practical skills not obtained in their higher qualification.

Table 6: The educational background of VET students, 1997 and 2000

Highest level of previous education attainment	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	1997 Number (000)	1997 Proportion (%)
Degree/postgraduate diploma	61.4	4.2	79.8	4.6
Associate diploma/undergraduate diploma	41.1	2.8	50.7	2.9
Trade/technical certificate	104.3	7.1	115.1	6.6
Other certificate	107.0	7.3	152.7	8.7
Other unspecified post-secondary	44.1	3.0	29.0	1.7
Sub-total tertiary	357.8	24.5	427.3	24.4
Year 12	274.0	18.8	296.8	17.0
Year 10 or 11	280.2	19.2	377.4	21.6
Year 9 or lower	81.8	5.6	112.6	6.4
Sub-total schooling only	636.0	43.6	786.8	45.0
Known total	993.9	68.1	1,214.1	69.4
Not stated	464.7	31.9	535.3	30.6
Total	1,458.6	100.0	1,749.4	100.0

While vocational education and training leads to employment for many school leavers and unemployed persons, it is estimated that two thirds (67%) of all vocational students in 2000 undertook training while in employment.

Geographic location

The distribution of vocational education and training students across Australia's States and Territories is shown in table 7. The distribution shows vocational students are generally spread across States and Territories according to each States and Territory's share of Australia's working age population. However, New South Wales and Victoria, the largest States in terms of population, have proportionately more vocational students than their population shares.

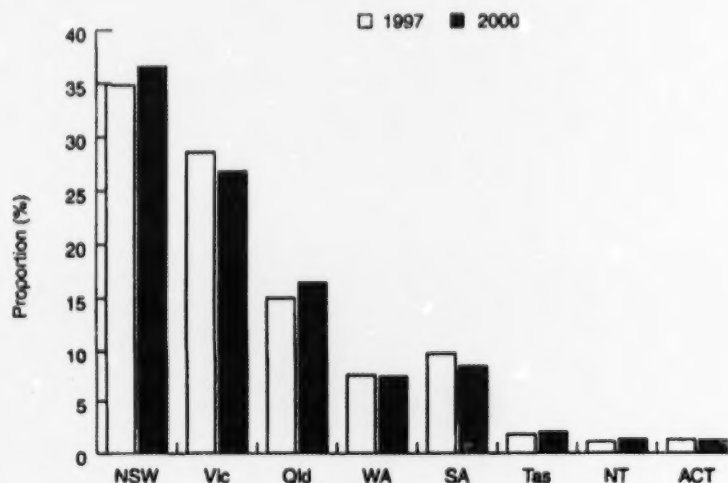
Table 7: VET students in each State and Territory, 2000

State/Territory	Number ('000)	Proportion (%)	Share of population* (%)
New South Wales	641.1	36.6	33.8
Victoria	468.6	26.8	25.1
Queensland	286.8	16.4	18.5
Western Australia	129.9	7.4	9.8
South Australia	146.2	8.4	7.9
Tasmania	34.2	2.0	2.4
Australian Capital Territory	20.2	1.2	1.6
Northern Territory	22.4	1.3	0.9

* based on population aged 15 years or more.

Figure 4 shows the change in each State or Territory's share of vocational students since 1997. Against a background of marginal change in population share, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania's share of Australia's vocational students has risen since 1997. In contrast, Victoria and South Australia's share has decreased. Although experiencing some minor changes, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and the Australian Capital Territory all had similar shares in 2000 as they did in 1997.

Figure 4: The proportion of VET students in each State and Territory, 1997 and 2000



Rural and remote Australia are being well served by Australia's vocational education and training system. As shown in Table 8, rural and remote areas have proportionately more vocational education and training students (that is, 33.5%) than their share of the population (28.1%).

On the other hand, capital cities appear less well covered by the vocational education and training system. While almost two-thirds (64.2%) of Australia's population live in capital cities, only 56.3% of vocational students reside in capital cities.

For other metropolitan areas, the proportion of vocational students (7.3%) is similar to that found for Australia's population (7.4%).

Table 8: VET students in each geographic region of Australia, 2000

Geographic region	Number ('000)	Proportion (%)	Share of population (%)
Capital city	984.2	56.3	64.2
Other metropolitan	126.9	7.3	7.4
Rural	522.4	29.9	25.3
Remote	63.7	3.6	2.8
Other*	52.1	3.0	0.2
Australia	1749.4	100.0	100.0

* Other includes outside Australia and regions not defined.

There has been little change to the proportions of vocational education and training students living in capital cities or rural and regional areas since 1997.

In terms of distances required to undertake training, it is not surprising to see marked differences between those students located in capital cities compared to those living in rural or remote regions of Australia. In 2000, the median commuter distance for remote students (70.6 kilometres) was almost seven times larger than that for students from metropolitan areas (10.8). Rural students travelled a median one-way commuter distance (18.6) almost twice that for metropolitan students (Table 9).

Table 9: Estimated one-way median commuter distances (in kilometres) for VET students, 1997 and 2000

Geographic region	1997	2000
Capital city	10.4	10.8
Other metropolitan	10.9	10.9
Rural	22.0	18.6
Remote	68.0	70.6
All students	11.6	11.7

Although differing slightly for rural and remote students, the median commuter distances in 2000 were broadly similar to that in 1997 (Table 9).

Indigenous students

Australia's record in providing adequate education and training opportunities to Indigenous peoples was very poor until the late 1980s. However this improved during the course of the 1990s. The numbers participating in recognised vocational education and training rose from 38 000 in 1997 to almost 52 000 students in 2000 (Table 10).

Table 10: Growth in the number of Indigenous VET students, 1997 to 2000

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)
1997	38.5	2.6	1,420.1	97.4
1998	44.4	2.9	1,490.8	97.1
1999	50.8	3.1	1,596.4	96.9
2000	51.7	3.0	1,697.7	97.0

* Includes those whose Aboriginality was not stated.

As a result of the increases during the 1990s, the proportion of vocational education and training students who are Indigenous increased from around 2.6% in 1997, to 3.0% by 2000.

Inequities continue to persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia's vocational education and training system. For instance, Indigenous students tend to do courses leading to lower qualifications when compared with the whole student population, an important indicator of equity. In 2000, 44% of Indigenous Australians reported their major course as one leading to an AQF certificate I or II qualification, while the proportion for non-Indigenous peoples was 21.5%. In contrast, 32.4% of Indigenous students reported their major course as one leading to an AQF certificate III qualification or higher while 41.5% of non-Indigenous students did so.

In terms of modules assessed in 2000, the proportion of completions was lower for Indigenous students than for the total VET student population, while Indigenous students showed higher proportions of withdrawal and unsuccessful completion rates.

People of non-English-speaking backgrounds

Around 12% of all vocational education and training students in 2000 reported that they were of non-English speaking background in terms of their country of birth.

Since 1997, the number of VET students of non-English speaking background has risen by 14.1%, from 177 600 in 1997 to 202 700 in 2000. However, despite the rise in absolute numbers, the proportion of all VET students of non-English speaking backgrounds has fallen, from 12.2% in 1997 to 11.6% in 2000 (Table 11).

Table 11: Growth in numbers of VET students from a non-English-speaking background, 1997 to 2000

	Non-English-speaking background		English-speaking background	
	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)
1997	177.6	12.2	1,281.0	87.8
1998	184.1	12.0	1,351.1	88.0
1999	194.1	11.8	1,453.1	88.2
2000	202.7	11.6	1,546.6	88.4

* Includes those whose Country of birth is not stated.

In the 1996 census of population and housing, about 15% of the working age population reported they were of non-English speaking background. While this suggests the rate for vocational education and training students is less than that for the general population, of more concern could be the apparent decline in participation in recent years. However, with more than one fifth of students not reporting their country of birth, some caution is required before concluding participation rates are in decline.

Over a quarter (26.1%) of students who were born in a non-English speaking country enrolled in courses in the 'vocational education and training multi-field education' field of study. As these courses include many general preparatory and language courses, it is not surprising the proportion for students from non-English speaking backgrounds was higher than for those from English speaking backgrounds (9.3%).

Students reporting a disability

The number of vocational students reporting a disability has risen 29% since 1997, from 48,200 to 62,100 in 2000. This represents an increase from 3.3% of all students in 1997 to 3.5% in 2000 (Table 12).

Table 12: Growth in the number of VET students reporting a disability, 1997 to 2000

	Reporting a disability		Not reporting a disability [*]	
	Number (000)	Proportion (%)	Number (000)	Proportion (%)
1997	48.2	3.3	1,410.4	96.7
1998	53.9	3.5	1,481.4	96.5
1999	63.2	3.8	1,584.0	96.2
2000	62.1	3.5	1,687.3	96.5

* Includes those with an undisclosed disability.

In the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1998 disability survey (ABS Cat. 4430.0), 16.7% of all Australians of working age (that is, 15 to 64 years of age) reported having a disability of some kind. Taking into account differences in the definition of disability used by ABS and for the National VET providers collection¹, the proportion of vocational education and training students with a disability still appears low compared with that of the general population.

This is explained to some extent by the different age profile of the disabled population, as older people are more likely to have a disability than younger people. More than 37% of vocational education and training students reporting a disability in 2000 were aged 40 years or higher while less than 29% of those not reporting a disability were aged 40 years or higher.

People reporting a disability in 2000 were slightly more likely to do courses leading to AQF certificate I or II qualifications than those who not reporting a disability. 29.2% of students reporting a disability were enrolled in AQF I and II courses as their major course. This compares with 21.9% of those students not reporting a disability. In addition, students reporting a disability are much more likely to be undertaking multi-field education courses as their major course (26.6% for students reporting a disability compared with 10.7% for students not reporting a disability). These programs are preparatory in nature and mostly include generic occupational skills rather than specific ones.

¹ Due to the differences in the definition of disability, the proportion of VET students reporting a disability cannot be directly compared with those in the national population in a meaningful manner. Furthermore, the ABS figures include people of all ages, whereas the majority of students doing VET are aged between 15 and 40

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